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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0389
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0411
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2099
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0848
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0195
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0896
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0108
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0157
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0079
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 0093
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0118
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 0431
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000662

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (SNELSIRE); SCA/PPD (KAMP)

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TAGS: [ENRG](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#) [US](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: CENTCOM ADMIRAL FALLON'S VISIT RECEIVES BROAD COVERAGE ON
TURKMENISTAN'S STATE AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

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SUMMARY

11. (U) Media coverage of U.S. CENTCOM Commander Admiral William Fallon's June 20 meeting with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov fell into two distinct trends, with international sources focusing on American competition with Russia for gas resources while state media concentrated on Turkmenistan's security partnership with the United States and Turkmenistan's support for Afghanistan. International media framed the meeting in the context of Russian and U.S. competition for pipeline construction while minimally discussing the security relationship. The exception to this was a New York Times article by C.J. Chivers that presented numerous security details. The state media praised the security relationship in the context of issues important to the general population: counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and border security. As could be expected, state media also continuously emphasized Fallon's compliments, Turkmenistan's aid to Afghanistan, and continued peaceful relations with their neighbors. End Summary.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: MORE OF THE UNIMAGINATIVE GREAT GAME

12. (U) Thorough and accurate coverage of the visit came from New York Times reporter C.J. Chivers in a June 21 article that refrained from directly criticizing the current regime. The article highlighted the U.S. and Turkmenistani governments' positive view of the meeting, but dedicated most of its content to background information on the country, regime, gas pipelines, and the security relationship with the United States. The article directly attacked Niyazov's policies while neutrally describing the current president,

noting announced reforms and citing all criticisms of Berdimuhamedov back to human rights groups and opposition members. Chivers used quotes by Admiral Fallon to show U.S. eagerness to engage with Turkmenistan, while the final quote illustrated U.S. sensitivity in pressing human rights issues. An abstract of this article contained the same tone. The International Herald Tribune published a shortened version of this article that cut out most of the details of U.S.-Turkmenistan security relationship but still carried the emphasis on the possible development of a Trans-Caspian pipeline.

¶3. (U) A June 21 Associated Press article by Alexander Vershinin focused on how Fallon's visit was part of a competition between Russia and the U.S. for influence in Turkmenistan. The article drew most of its information on the actual meeting from positive quotations in Turkmenistan state media sources. Vershinin also cited the New York Times article's mention of Fallon pushing a Trans-Caspian pipeline and the president's hesitation on the issue. Vershinin added that the state media did not mention this portion of the meeting. The article continued to emphasize the vast energy wealth of the region as the prize in a new 'Great Game,' but also noted the positive role Turkmenistan played in stabilizing Afghanistan as another reason for U.S. interest in the country.

¶4. (U) A brief piece by Radio Free Europe stated that Berdimuhamedov supported the stabilization of Afghanistan, a Trans-Caspian pipeline, and expanding relations with the United States government and businesses during his meeting with Fallon. News Central Asia published a piece (also carried by The Journal of Turkish weekly) that drew heavily on state media sources to give another positive assessment of the growing cooperation between the two countries. The article ended with incorrect speculation that Admiral Fallon would be returning in a week for more meetings. (Note: The positive tone of the News Central Asia article was out of character, as this source typically carries an anti-western slant. However, it did maintain its pro-Government of Turkmenistan perspective. End Note.)

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¶5. (U) Russian Itar-Tass News agency (Russian) on June 20 and Xinhua News Agency (Chinese-origin/Russian-language) on June 21, based on news reports from Turkmenistan's state media, reported on Admiral Fallon's visit with similar content to the State Watan TV News broadcast. Both news agencies reported that Fallon praised Turkmenistan's role in the peaceful development of Afghanistan, with exports of electricity and natural gas.

STATE MEDIA: TURKMENISTAN, SAVIOR OF AFGHANISTAN

¶6. (U) The state Watan TV News program's June 20 news-broadcast highlighted Fallon's positive comments on the regime and the benefits of the U.S.-Turkmenistan security relationship, and carried most of his interview with reporters. The broadcast stated that Fallon had congratulated the president on his election and expressed confidence in the president's ability to develop the country rapidly. The interlocutors had discussed many issues but security had been the chief topic. Fallon and the president had focused the security discussion on cooperation in fighting terrorism, protecting borders, and preventing narcotics trafficking, as these phenomena would quickly destabilize the country. President Berdimuhamedov had emphasized the importance of political neutrality, especially in regards to remaining on good terms with its neighbors. Fallon had praised Turkmenistan's role in developing peace in Afghanistan while President Berdimuhamedov had noted the gas and supplies they had given to their neighbor. Fallon had said that he was satisfied with the meeting and overall with the country of Turkmenistan. Watan then broadcasted most of Fallon's interview that emphasized the benefits of security and his compliments of the country, its people, and president. The broadcast ended with a reaffirmation of the president's policy of neutrality and peaceful cooperation with all of its neighbors. (Comment: The interview appears edited for brevity, not to censor sensitive content. End Comment.)

¶7. (U) Russia-based pro-Turkmenistan news website Turkmenistan.ru published a short piece focusing on how the meeting will strengthen

the positive security relationship between the two countries. The article carried a quote by Fallon emphasizing how the cooperation will assist both countries in combating terrorism, stopping drug trafficking, and securing borders. The article noted Turkmenistan's role in promoting peace in Afghanistan and supplying them with gas and electricity.

¶8. (U) On June 21, state dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 35,141) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 28,091) gave a front page treatment to an article with a similar content to the Watan TV News broadcast. In subsequent days, state weeklies "Watan" (Turkmen, circ. 26,091), "Nesli" (Turkmen, circ. 22,311), "Ashgabat" (Turkmen, circ. 16,171), "Balkan" (Turkmen, circ. 24,630), "Ahal Durmushy" (Turkmen, circ. 35,391), "Maru-Shahu Jahan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,220), "Turkmen Gundogary" (Turkmen, circ. 44,160), "Dashoguz Habarlary" (Turkmen, circ. 27,070) and "Habarlary" (Turkmen, circ. 3,596) also gave front page treatment to the same article from the dailies.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) Admiral Fallon's meeting with Turkmenistan's President received positive coverage in state media sources and generally neutral, pipeline-centered coverage in international media. While the Turkmenistan state media praised this partnership, they also carefully and continuously defined the limited nature of the relationship and the importance of maintaining permanent neutrality.

This indicates a positive governmental view of the United States, while exposing Turkmenistan's desire to maintain a balancing act

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amongst regional powers.

¶9. (SBU) In contrast to press following a visit by CENTCOM commander Abizaid two years ago, post was surprised that Russian media outlets did not use the Fallon visit as an opportunity to speculate about sinister U.S. military motives in the region. It is unclear whether this was the result of an improved Turkmenistan-Russia relationship or because Russian news media was occupied with other news stories. End Comment.

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